

2021 - Town of Port Hawkesbury Year in Review

Abstract

Town of Port Hawkesbury Council has identified five key strategic areas of focus that include Housing, Waterfront Development, Physician and Medical Health Care Professional Retention and Recruitment, Economic Development, and Active Living (which includes Active Transportation, Recreation and Community Development). The following review outlines the progress we've made on these files and others over the course of 2021. Covid has presented many challenges for the Town, for Businesses, and for the people living in our Community. Despite these challenges, the Town has been active and progressive, and we are proud of the results we've been able to achieve in 2021, and we look forward to another positive and progressive year in 2022.

On behalf of Town Council, I'd like to thank our Town staff, our Town-based businesses who despite insurmountable odds continue to be sustainable, our Town residents and volunteers who continue to work hard to make our community a better place to live, and the many organizations and stakeholders who work with the town to make our Town and region a welcoming, accessible, and inclusive place to live work and play.

Strategic Priority #1: Housing

2021 Housing Survey

A survey on housing needs was launched in collaboration with the Cape Breton Partnership that supports the need for new housing developments in Port Hawkesbury. There were more than 650 survey respondents who outlined the need for affordable housing, accessible housing, seniors housing, student housing, high-end housing for professionals and families, as well as pet-friendly housing. We will continue to work with the Cape Breton Partnership and the survey data to meet with developers to market the town as a location for housing projects. We are also working on a strategy to share the survey results in the New Year to both developers and the general community, with the end goal being attracting investment that will improve housing stock in the community in 2022 and beyond.

The survey data has been digitized by the Cape Breton Partnership for ease of use and presentation of data results.

Housing Advisory Committee

The Committee is made up of elected officials, town staff, stakeholder groups, and community members to take a deep dive into understanding our housing challenges as well

as to explore our housing opportunities as well. We have are working on various strategies for 2022 to make strides on improving housing stock which include working with the Chamber of Commerce to have a “housing-focus” for the next “State of the Strait”, to work with both the Federal and Provincial Governments on the possible funding/provision of a housing development position to improve our capacity, and to explore the merits of the establishment of a non-profit housing enterprise that can meet the needs of affordable housing to meet the needs not currently being met by the private sector.

2021 Developer Meetings

Elected Council members, Town staff, members of the housing committee, and Cape Breton Partnership staff have met both in-person and virtually with various housing developers who expressed interest in learning about housing opportunities in the Town. In these meetings we shared preliminary survey results, reviewed the opportunities and need for housing in the Town, and provided any information and/or answered any questions by those developers who requested these meetings. We will continue to meet and engage with developers in 2022 with the goal of realizing new housing projects being built by the private sector.

Straight Richmond Housing Matters Coalition (also an example of regional collaboration)

This is a coalition made up of elected officials from both the Town of Port Hawkesbury and the Municipality of the County of Richmond, service-group stakeholders (like Leaside), public sector stakeholders (Public health, Stfx Extension), and community members. We discuss housing challenges and solutions, and are in the process of completing a housing service-based count to better understand our housing needs in the Cape Breton south region. This group has been active also in hosting housing think tanks and housing-focussed “people’s school” to better understand both the housing gaps and the housing needs in our region.

Strategic Priority #2: Waterfront Development

Waterfront Development Advisory Committee

We have a very dedicated group of community members who work with both Town staff and elected officials to identify opportunities for growth and development at our Waterfront and Granville Street areas. This year we’ve reviewed a draft waterfront plan and we look forward to its completion in the New Year. As a group we also organized a community consultation session for the waterfront that generated some amazing ideas that will be highlighted in the final plan. Part of the work of this committee has been working with Town staff on beautification efforts. Some repairs have been done to the boardwalk,

and benches/garbage cans/benches were repaired/painted, as well as painting of buildings and roof work completed at the waterfront as well. The committee is also working with the town for the design of “Sunset Park” (a name that was moved forward by this committee and adopted by motion by council) located on the northern end of Granville Street at the entrance to the Town. The committee is also working on plans to improve signage and the potential for economic development spaces at the waterfront.

Creamery Building Renovations and the Oceans Innovation Centre

The former Creamery Building has been truly transformed and is currently the location of both the Oceans Innovation Centre – a joint project with the Town, the Cape Breton Partnership, and other stakeholders, as well as an extension learning site for the NSCC Nautical Institute that is directly on the waterfront for water-based training. The Ocean’s Innovation Centre has a grand opening that included a strategy session for potential programming that can be implemented there (yet to be determined), with a variety of stakeholders who are interested in Innovation, economic development, business, and industry. There continues to be about 1/3 of the building yet to be used/renovated, and in 2022, the Town hopes to determine an appropriate use and/or potential tenants for that space. This year it was very encouraging to see new life breathed into this chronically vacant building that has long-standing importance and historical significance in our community.

Strategic Priority #3: Physician and Medical Health Care Professional Retention and Recruitment

Cape Breton South Recruiting for Health (also included under Regional Collaboration)

The Town of Port Hawkesbury and the Municipality of the County of Richmond have joined forces with other medical health care stakeholders to work together on this file. We’ve co-funded a full-time navigator position to work directly on retention and recruitment efforts, and to carry out strategies set by our CBSRH committee that meets 1-2 times each month. We’ve been able to successfully recruit medical health care professionals to the Cape Breton South area this year. Other work – such as service recognition awards – has been great work towards retention efforts. We are also working with regional and provincial stakeholders on Cape Breton South-specific solutions to bridge our health care gaps/needs.

Health Care Professional Site Visits

Town Staff and members of the CBSRH team have worked together various times to host site visits when needed, to give visiting health care professionals a very personable and intimate tour of the Town and region, to better improve our recruitment efforts. The town

also continues to add to our marketing tools that we can use, and that can be used by CBSRH to prepare for site visits (like welcome to Port Hawkesbury videos, materials, etc.).

Strategic Priority #4: Economic Development

Economic Development Advisory Committee

This committee is made up of community members, business members, and representatives from the Strait Area Chamber of Commerce, the Cape Breton Partnership, the Cape Breton Regional Enterprise Network, as well as elected officials and Town staff. We continue to explore opportunities that are of economic benefit to the Town of Port Hawkesbury. Our committee formed a sub-committee to research the economic potential of Off-Shore Wind for the region – a topic that we require more knowledge and capacity to understand; this opportunity was introduced to our committee as we currently have a business that has re-located to the Town who is interested in establishing a demonstration project in the Strait of Canso in the Offshore Wind field. This committee will continue to review this file as well as others in the New Year, and some of our members are participating in an “offshore wind” task force made up of regional members to continue to study this opportunity.

Destination Reeves Street

This year we’ve been able to study the overall results of the project that served as a complete revitalization of our Town’s main street that is ironically owned/serviced by the Province of Nova Scotia. There remain two main components of this project that requires completion. First is the continuation of the Active Transportation Trail that currently begins at the NSCC Strait Area Campus and Nautical Institute and ends at the Pitt and Reeves intersection; the AT trail is proposed to continue from Pitt to Old Sydney Road, and this part of the project is currently incorporated into the Connect Port Hawkesbury project that includes 7kms of multimodal trail development. The second component is the determination of the road diet pilot. The town and the Province are currently finalizing a survey that will help determine the overall results, as part of the community consultation process. This data will be studied along with the traffic data (such as speed, incidences of motor vehicle incidents, severity of accidents, etc.) both before the road changes and afterwards, so a determination can be made with regard to this pilot in 2022.

Other Economic Developments

New lease for a business on the waterfront – Portside Port Hawkesbury

Partnership with NSCC and the Nautical Institute and long-term lease for a significant portion of the former creamery building.

Other new leases, Early Childhood Intervention, Body and Soul in January of 2021, YMCA Employment services

It was also great to see the new Groove Box café open on Granville Street, and how busy and well-received it was by the community.

Strategic Priority #5: Active Living (includes Active Transportation, Recreation and Community Development)

2021 Recreation & Community Events

Working within the COVID public health protocols, we managed to continue to provide safe recreation and community events over the past year. Ticketed events continued at reduced capacity, with a compliment of smaller-scale programs, such as paint nights, yoga, kids dance classes, etc. Continuing to provide recreation and community events is important because it contributes to community health and wellness, and helps residents to remain active and engaged during a challenging year.

The Christmas parade, Santa visit, family skate and festival of the trees was well attended and brought some life to the season, and a sensory friendly Santa visit was also included this year, to ensure these seasonal events were accessible to as many children as possible.

“Tunes on the Trails” was a new music and recreation venture this year that was implemented via Federal government support. This was a safe outdoor music experience that was hosted in our well-used trail system as a venue which combined music, walking, nature, and community. This “Tunes on the Trails” series included 5 nights of music with 3 local artists, and was enjoyed by those who attended.

Lastly, various community-based programs were implemented in partnership with other community groups that saw care packages and meals delivered to citizens, as well as programs for families to be able to use sports equipment, E-bikes, games for free to encourage an active and healthy lifestyle despite the challenges of coved, and the limiting of social interaction in the community.

2021 Active Transportation

We continue to focus on active transportation improvement and our active transportation network. We’re excited to be moving forward with a 3M in active transportation improvements throughout the community over the next 5 years. The areas include the Community Park, waterfront, reeves street/old Sydney road, eastern town (mobile home Park). The upgrades will include safer active transportation connections and facilities along with lighting, beautification and amenities.

2021 Port Hawkesbury Community Trails

Throughout 2021, there have been continued upgrades and maintenance on Strait Area trails through a group of dedicated volunteers, the Strait Area Trails Association. We appreciate the work of Larry MacKeigan and his group of dedicated volunteers.

2021 Inclusivity projects

Accessibility

Accessibility was a major focus of the town this year. With a newly formed accessibility committee engaging the public through both social media and via an Accessibility survey – we are well on our way to drafting an Accessibility Plan to Council in the new year that will present a framework and strategies for how we can make our Town more accessible to all persons no matter their age or level of ability.

With regard to Accessibility Projects, Town staff have planned and implemented several infrastructure improvements that improve accessibility. Some of these include the installation of pathways at the Community Park and at the Trail Head to the Reeves street Active Transportation trail; accessible parking were also added at both of these locations.

Pride Week collaboration and refresh/installation of Rainbow Crosswalks

The Town did a refresh on our rainbow crosswalks and collaborated on some Pride Day festivities and events, including the “Fountain of Love” project that invited citizens to take their painted pride rocks up to the fountain located at the trail head near the Reeves Street Active Transportation Trail. We appreciate the amazing leadership of Taylor Linloff on these projects. The town also added a new pride sidewalk on Granville and MacSween Street near the new Groove Box Café.

2021 Welcoming Newcomers Event

In collaboration with YReach, a newcomer event was held in the community park in September – over 200 people who attended over a 3-hour period for a fun evening of coming together with our neighbours and new comers to the Town and the Strait Region. It was a wonderful event that created purposeful positive collisions between community members and new comer community members. Many new friendships were forged during this event, and feedback received was wonderful from both new comers and established community members. We are considering make this event an annual one.

Review of Other Town Projects/Work

2021 Public Works Projects

Ensuring our town has the proper infrastructure upgrades in an important aspect of both economic development and population retention and growth. Our public works and town staff are always focussed on ensuring we are always tackling our infrastructure needed repairs in both a fiscally responsible and progressive way. Unlike rural municipalities, Towns are carry the sole responsibility of preventative maintenance and replacement/repair of our roads and underground infrastructure, and we, as a town council, understand that it is important to continue to work on road safety, road maintenance, sidewalks and ensure business continuity of services like water, sewer, waste removal and snow removal more.

Intersection Safety Improvements

After considerable community consultation and studies regarding traffic on Granville Street over the past 24 months, traffic calming measures including the placement of new stop signs and a newly re-configured intersection at Old Sydney Road were installed to provide a safer roadway for all users of Granville Street.

Water upgrades

Through Provincial assistance through the PCAP program, we were able to do some essential upgrades to our controls at the Water Treatment Plant.

Policies

Staff prepared and presented a winter control policy which was approved and supported by Council this year.

Other public works projects included security upgrades at treatment plant facilities, the paving of Macintosh avenue, Philpott Street sidewalk replacements, and an intensive patching and pothole program for streets in Town continues as it has in 2020, and will continue into 2022.

Emergency Preparedness

Generators were installed at both the Allan J MacEachen Airport and the Port Hawkesbury Volunteer Fire Department, to assist with emergency preparedness in case of incremental weather that may lead to power outages. The Port Hawkesbury Civic Centre used to be the only location that is able to be used as a warming/comfort centre, and with the installation of a generator at the Fire hall, this too can be used as a warming/comfort centre during times of prolonged power outages.

2021 Truth and Reconciliation

Reconcili-action

This September the Town hosted an “orange ribbon” ceremony as well as a blanket exercise, which drew participation from many of our surrounding First Nation and Municipal communities. The Orange Ribbon Ceremony had dignitaries such as Judge Laurie MacQuarrie-Halfpenny, Councillor Steven Googoo, Councillor Anita Basque, as well as Elder McEwan in attendance to bring attention to the impact of Residential Schools, and to honour the memories of the many children found in mass graves on the sites of former Residential schools across the country. The Blanket ceremony was equally well attended, that educated participants about the history of colonization through the eyes of Indigenous Peoples, and to better understand the historical atrocities committed against First Nation Peoples over the centuries.

Commitment to fly the Mi'kmaq Flag Permanently

Town Council also committed, by motion, to install a 4th flag pole at the Civic Centre with the sole purpose of flying the Mi'kmaq flag permanently in the Town of Port Hawkesbury in 2022. An important ceremony will be held in 2022 to celebrate this act of Truth and Reconciliation and to honour the Unam'aki Chiefs, Councils, and community members we are fortunate to know and share friendship with, as well as those Chiefs, Councils and community members of Mi'kma'ki.

2021 Community Engagement

We were so fortunate this year to be able to realize a tremendous amount of community engagement. We saw the creation of three new community advisory committees during the year to get input and feedback for strategic areas for Council on housing, and economic development and active living. We also have seen a tremendous amount of activity and engagement on our social media pages, and the Accessibility Advisory Committee has also been able to effectively engage the community on their social media page as well.

Covid definitely have presented some challenges for in-person gathering, and despite Council meetings pivoting to virtual sessions, we've been grateful to see citizens and media continuing to attend virtually, and to be interested in Council business and Town-related issues and opportunities.

The town staff and elected officials will continue to do our best to keep the community engaged

2021 Regional Collaboration

This year some of the goals that were set by the original One Cape Breton/One Unama'ki gather first held in 2017 in Port Hawkesbury were realized with the installation of the "Pjila'si Unama'ki" Sign at Causeway. This was a wonderful regional project to see completed!

The Town of Port Hawkesbury and the Municipality of the County of Richmond were also proud to reach a long-term Contract/agreement for the provision of Fire Services for the Point Tupper residents, Businesses, and Industries by the Port Hawkesbury Volunteer Fire Department. We are grateful for all those who helped, including the Port Hawkesbury Volunteer Fire Department, in solidify this agreement.

Another project that continues to see progress this year is the Cape Breton Strait of Canso Gateway Project. In 2022 we hope to see this project fleshed out more, and as it continues to build momentum, it will be a truly Island-wide project that includes all five First Nation Communities and all five Municipalities, along with other stakeholders.

Other 2021 regional collaboration work continues via regional committees, like the Allan J MacEachen Regional Airport Committee, Eastern District Planning Committee, Policing Committee, Landry Lake Water Utility, Eastern Counties Regional Library Committee, Strait Area Transit, Strait Richmond Housing Matters Committee, Cape Breton South Recruiting for Health, the Cape Breton Regional Enterprise Network, The Cape Breton Local Immigration Pilot, CEPI, Pitu'paq, Destination Cape Breton Association, and more. Regional collaboration is the mainstay of the One Nova Scotia vision, and is the best way to grow our regions together.